

Julián Santos Guerrero

## REPRESENTATION, REAPPROPRIATION: THE BODY OF THE IMAGE IN THE MYSTICAL TEXT OF TERESA OF AVILA

### ABSTRACT

What follows is but the attempt to draw the lessons from the mystical and visionary text of Teresa of Ávila in order to consider today issues that concern us, questions that are asked of Aesthetics, and not only as theoretical discipline that theorises on the arts and considers the beautiful, but as a reflection on *aisthesis*, of sensitivity, of the sensitive edge exposed by a constituent relationship which installs the human in a world. Consideration, then, of the happening, of entering the world, creative experience. This essay seeks to consider the relationship between the image and the body via the visionary discourse of the mystics, because their writings question and lend shape to a large number of formulae of thought that can help us better understand the questions facing us today. Let us imagine that the mystics made of their body a frontier or a support where what by definition has no place could take place. Place: part of space occupied by a body (Newton), the boundary of a containing object (Aristotle). This then is what is addressed here, a question of boundaries.

### KEYWORDS

Image, Body, Mystical Text, Teresa of Ávila, Limit

A poem is always a cross between body and image, between the heard, spoken word, and an imagination that represents it, a rhythm too that passes between the body and the written image, a cadence of accents and sounds, a transition fragmented into verse, broken.

The verses below have a visionary content. They were written by Teresa of Jesus, the mystical Carmelite nun who lived in Spain between her birth in 1515 and her death in 1582:

Soul, thou must seek thyself in Me  
And thou must seek for Me in thee.  
Such is the power of love's impress,  
O soul, to grave thee on My heart,  
That any craftsman must confess  
He never could have the like success,  
However superlative his art.  
[...]  
And if perchance thou knowest not  
Whither to go in quest of Me,

Go not abroad My face to see,  
Roaming about from spot to spot,  
For, soul, in thee I am confined.

(“Búscate en mí”, *Poesías*, 4) (Teresa de Jesús 1994: 1162)

For the moment I shall highlight only the spectacular play of images. Christ speaks and says to the soul: “Soul, thou must seek thyself in Me / And thou must seek for Me in thee”. What follows is but the attempt to draw the lessons from a mystical and visionary text in order to consider today issues that concern us, questions that are asked of Aesthetics, and not only as theoretical discipline that theorises on the arts and considers the beautiful, but as a reflection on *aísthesis*, of sensitivity, of the sensitive edge exposed by a constituent relationship which installs the human in a world. Consideration, then, of the happening, of entering the world, creative experience.

This essay seeks to consider the relationship between the image and the body via the visionary discourse of the mystics, because their writings question and lend shape to a large number of formulae of thought that can help us better understand the questions facing us today. Let us imagine that the mystics made of their body a frontier or a support where what by definition has no place could take place. Place: part of space occupied by a body (Newton), the boundary of a containing object (Aristotle). This then is what is addressed here, a question of boundaries.

The articulation of Christianity begins with the presence of Christ, of the Messiah, of the Son of God who assumes mortal shape at a historical moment; but at the same time, that event points to an absence, that of Christ, who abandons earth after his resurrection, leaving mortal men as orphans without his body. Henceforth, the sentence “*Hoc est enim corpus meum*” turns out to be the mechanism of symbolic (and real for the believer) appropriation by means of which the Absent One is re-presented, while still maintaining a semblance of absence, an impossible appropriation that marks Christianity with the horizon of the search for a body. The chain of substitutes grows and grows, and thus “Host”, “Mystical body”, “Ecclesiastical body”, “Doctrinal body”, “Temple of the body”, etc., all pursue the same goal: provide the spirit with a body. All the substitutes obey one single horizon of search.

Well, as Michel de Certeau comments:

The production of a body plays an essential role in mystics. What is termed a rejection of the “body” of the “world”, ascetic struggle, prophetic rupture, is but the necessary and preliminary elucidation of a state of affairs at which point begins the task of offering a body to the spirit. (De Certeau 1982, I: 108)

And that task begs the initial question that is the obsessions of the mystic discourse in general, and in particular of mystic discourse in the 16<sup>th</sup> century: *what is a body?*

## The Question of the Body

Besides the varied, perhaps infinite possible answers to this question, it could be said that the writings of Teresa of Ávila in this respect follow two main vectors or directions. One, which sees the body as a symbolic structure that refers to an

outside oneself, another self. And two, the direction that is inward-looking. The body as support or as edge of the world where spiritual life on earth, the body that contains the soul, takes place.

1. Let us consider the first, outward, vector: the body, like nature in general, is something the origins of which are not to be found in itself; its entity is derived, secondary, and acquires ontological status insofar as it is the footprint of its creator, to which logically it must refer. However, on occasions we may neglect or even stray from that reference. Thus a body of writing exists, which evidences a clear separation between what the body is and what the body says. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century it is obvious that words are already disconnected from things.<sup>1</sup> This in a way is the drama experienced by the mystic: the divorce between the original and the representation, between God and the world. Hence the inconsolable nostalgia for origin and the imperious need to return there. To return is to again identify words with the world of facts, to recover the lost language that links creature with creator, image with origin. Which explains why the forms of prayer of each Teresian foundation seek to re-establish that lost order, reduce that difference.

Continuing in this direction we could call the body body-sign or body-image, which implies an ontological need (the body can only be image, derivation, shadow), and an ontic contingency (nonetheless, independent body, shadow that can no longer refer to its origin). However, the same thing that permits the schism, the wandering of images without any “correct” reference, that which permits error or fall, also makes possible return, redemption or re-appropriation, return to one’s own reference.

If the body, and the world in general, is image, in other words, if it consists of an outside *itself* that renders it body-image, then that outside itself does not demand a guaranteed reference. Being an image means, then, being *an image of*, which does not mean, strictly speaking, that that of which it is an image is mentioned unequivocally. The Holy Scriptures is a body-image that speaks of God; the world or nature are too, but it is necessary however to listen, hone one’s vision, learn a language to find the meaning of that reference. Otherwise, the error nested in that distance between original and representation may reveal itself. For Spanish mysticism the case of the Protestant Reformation is but an example of this. Prayer, on the other hand, is that language which teaches about differences and how to address them,<sup>2</sup> and the Roman Catholic Church is the only teacher.

The bond is no longer clear, in fact, it is broken, and this calls for the implementation of a complex restorative technique ranging from textual hermeneutics to the way of looking at images, engravings, paintings, or of seeing the world and

---

1 The reference to nominalism is essential here.

2 “Now it seems to me that, when God has brought someone to a clear knowledge of the world, and of its nature, and of the fact that another world exists, and that there is a great difference between the one and the other, the one being eternal and the other only a dream, [...] and what the Creator is and what the creature, and many other things which the Lord teaches to those who are willing to devote themselves to being taught by Him in prayer, [...] then one loves very differently from those of us who have not advanced thus far.” (*Camino de perfección*, 6, 3) (Teresa de Jesús 1994: 681)

acting upon it.<sup>3</sup> It is a question of making a “living book”<sup>4</sup> and of recovering lost unity. However, as there is an interval, a fracture, there is room for an entity that falsifies or mystifies the correct adaptation, a creature of deceit and inappropriate appearance: the devil.

The world and the devil constitute one and the same front. The world short-circuits the correct reference, rendering the image independent of the reference, transforming everything within it into a “dream” or a “mockery”<sup>5</sup>, into a drifting spectacle, devoid of sense or truth. The devil meanwhile confuses the reference, puts before one’s eyes what it is not, a false reference of things and images; makes the human believe via a great illusion<sup>6</sup> what it is not: a self-serving mockery intended to render impossible redemption, the return to the origin.

And that is where there is separation between being and saying or, put another way, between image and origin, room for loss, error, inversion, deviation, mystification or deceit. The tropic moment takes hold of that body-image in uncontrolled fashion.

In short: bodies are images of the transcendental, their meaning is outside themselves. They are as such *outside themselves*. The error is, then, to invert direction of the vector, claiming that images, shadows that are bodies, themselves have meaning; even that they are real. In other words, to err is to “dwell on them” instead of relating them to their original reality. The essence of the error is, ultimately, not correctly performing the hermeneutic transfer:

Those whom God brings to this state are, I think, generous and royal souls; they are not content with loving anything so miserable as these bodies, however beautiful they be and however numerous the graces they possess. If the sight of the body gives them pleasure, they praise the Creator, but as for dwelling upon it for more than just a moment – no! When I use that phrase “dwelling upon it”, I refer to having love for such things. If they had such love, they would think they were loving something insubstantial and were conceiving fondness for a shadow. (*Camino de perfección*, 6, 4) (Teresa de Jesús 1994: 681)

Given its imaginary condition, a body is something always unresolved, a complex that keeps precisely in its necessary outside itself the very impossibility of its resolution in the present. A body is not, then, a “body present”, and although it demands an outside itself, it never saturates that reference. Consequently, error is consubstantial to life, and therefore to the body; hence the permanent vigilance. Living is keeping watch: “Ya no durmáis, no durmáis, / pues que no hay paz en la tierra.” (*Poesías*, 24) (Teresa de Jesús 1994: 1180) She does not express the vigil in

---

3 “I was able to think of Christ only as man. But so it was; and I never could form any image of Him to myself, though I read much of His beauty, and looked at pictures of Him. I was like one who is blind, or in the dark, who, though speaking to a person present and feels his presence [...], does not see him.” (*Libro de la Vida*, 9, 6) (Teresa de Jesús 1994: 52)

4 “Our Lord said to me, ‘Be not troubled; I will give thee a living book.’” (*Libro de la Vida*, 26, 6) (Teresa de Jesús 1994: 170)

5 “Everything I see with my bodily eyes seems to be a dream and a mockery.” (*Libro de la Vida*, 38, 6). (Ibid)

6 “He (the devil) traps us in a thousand ways.” (*Las Moradas*, I, 2, 12) (Teresa de Jesús 1994: 848)

search of peace on earth as the goal of mankind, rather the categorical asseveration of an impossibility: *there is no peace on earth*.

2. Let us now consider the other direction, inwards. According to Teresa the body contains a dark interior, opaque to the light of understanding. Physical intimacy is an enigma in itself. It continually surprises us because it does not allow itself to be controlled or governed in terms of any knowledge. The body is capricious, disrespectful of meaning and recalcitrant in its manoeuvres of concealment. In its opacity it eludes any formula of comprehension and, unpredictable, always keeps an insoluble conundrum in its interior. This places it, in the eyes of Teresa of Jesus, in a situation of radical mistrust. The body is not to be trusted because its desire is to free itself of the government and the ownership of the spirit (the sole sphere of ownership that is conceived). Its tendency is none other than the prevention or, even, the annihilation of all spiritual life, and with it, of all light and all truth.

This could in a strict sense be described as a “prison” body, within which is confined what is no longer a concealed meaning, hidden and awaiting revelation, but a meaninglessness, deficiency, the absolutely irreducible to terms of presence or evidence; accessible to neither senses nor intellect. In the body there is something inscrutable, and insofar as it resists and hinders any appropriation, any ownership, it assumes for Teresa the names of what is devalued, of the miasma: “rubbish”, “mud”; of the opaque and stubborn resistance to light: “veil”, “shadow”; or of the suffering separation from a real, eternal, true life: “irons”, “place of exile”, “prison”, “death”, etc. Body as prison and body as tomb: body as crypt, therefore.

In the Carmelite mystic’s texts the body appears as something heavy that carries death within it. From this inward-looking vector, the body endures a loss and manifests an internal absence, a separation from itself and from any selfhood. Thus, a body is always a dead support, a dead person’s body. According to Teresa, that renders this life a permanent mourning: “La vida terrena / es continuo duelo; / vida verdadera, / la hay sólo en el cielo.” (*Poesías*, 10) (Teresa de Jesús 1994: 1168)

Yet, as in the case of all mourning, the feeling of suffering is twofold: love and fear.<sup>7</sup> The loss of the loving object and, consequently, the desperate search for the missing loved one. The attraction to and fascination with the body and what it has of the impossible, the corporality of the body, its most secret interior, that otherness of the body: a cryptic, hidden *otherness* (*krúpto*: I hide). Love for the absent body that slides towards the body of the Other, of the great absentee: desire for body (Christianity as desire for body, for the body of the Anointed One, of the One Marked by stigma or the sign of the secret, *Christós*). The crypt indicates the place of the dead, places within reach of their impossibility, their inaccessibility. Hiding them however gives them a place, a space of secrecy and love amongst the living.

Fear too in mourning, fear of the dead, terror at the ungovernable nature of the body, torchbearer of impropriety and insecurity. Hence the dread of being infected by the miasma, by death. A crypt offers protection from the dead, from their

---

<sup>7</sup> These two words are the keys that Teresa gives her nuns as laws of life: “Show us, then, O our good Master, some way in which we may live through this most dangerous warfare without frequent surprise. The best way that we can do this, daughters, is to use the love and fear given us by His Majesty.” (*Camino de perfección*, 40, 1) (Teresa de Jesús 1994: 798)

impurity, imprisons them, literally. The crypt is this, the place of difference, the border zone, the support of what has no place; a placelessness, a frontier before what has no place. Every crypt is a driver of fiction.

In Teresian language the fear of the body resembles fear of eternal death, of damnation and of sin, fear of being forever separated from Christ and the truth. The origin of all this is the finite body or, put another way, the finiteness of the body, its deficiency, its radical, inaccessible limitation, *the otherness of the body*. Meanwhile love is presented in the text as love of death, desire for death and, accordingly, love of bodily limitation. Love that is fascination with that otherness of the body in the body, an attraction to intimate death, to bodily collapse. In other words, desire for that limitation of the body contained in or supported by the body-crypt: “I die because I do not die.” (*Poesías*, 1) (Teresa de Jesús 1994: 1159)

All of this is followed by a sensation of pleasure produced by physical death which, of course, is corroborated with the amorous virtual oneness with Christ beyond earthly life. A life identified with the absence of the Absentee and which leads once it is over to the actual representation of Christ. The desire for body comes to mean this: crossing, passing the limit. And the pleasure this conveys is the pleasure of going beyond the limit, the immensity of its infinitisation, of its passage into the infinite. Pleasure of excess:

Who fears the body's death  
If one then gains  
A pleasure so great?

And then we read:

¡Oh yes: in living,  
You forever, my God!  
Longing to see you, I wish to die.  
(*Poesías*, 10) (Teresa de Jesús 1994: 1168–1169)

We should understand that the body-crypt, the body-support, is accompanied by the impediment to union with death; it provides a place for the dead, for the secret; but at the same time keeps it at a distance, in meaninglessness, sheltered from both sensitive appropriation and intelligible meaning. Hidden from the light of understanding, from the radiance of truth. The body is the border that impedes identitary ownership, amorous, mystical union, and also the subject's union with itself: *ego cogito*<sup>8</sup>. The body crypt, like the body image before, far from being a space of ownership, it is one of remoteness, of uncertainty and of alienation.<sup>9</sup>

8 In this respect see Derrida 1985 and Nancy 2007.

9 Thus is explained in chapter 20 of the *Libro de la Vida* the experience of “rapture”: “The effects of rapture are great: one is that the mighty power of our Lord is manifested; and as we are not strong enough, when His Majesty wills it, to control either soul or body, so neither have we any power over it; but, whether we like it or not, we see that there is one mightier than we are, that these graces are His gifts, and that of ourselves we can do nothing whatever; and humility is deeply imprinted in us.” (20, 7). (Teresa de Jesús 1994: 121) On this notion of the crypt effect see Derrida 1982.

## The Question of the Soul

The question now is how to render liveable that mourning which is the body crypt, how to endure the mourning that is accompanied by the body support of impossibility. Well, the way in which this mourning is rendered liveable is also the way in which the mourning is rendered interminable. Rendering it liveable, bearable, is to render it interminable. The solution is the re-appropriation of the deceased, in other words, move them to the inner self, take them with you; but this time neutered of their miasmas, of their bodily characteristics. Or in other words, purify it by means of a manoeuvre of idealisation that transforms into selfhood that otherness that the limit of the body turns out to be. Ultimately: separate from it without discarding it; transform the alien into one's own death; own, in other words, *of* somebody, and governable through an ownership, by an idea.

To idealise it is to transform it into an idea, an aspect, an "interior image"; render it controllable via an ideal surrogate transparent to meaning and, thereby, eliminate its obtuse silence, its alien character, its foreignness or its impropriety. To idealise it is to take it over, neuter and swallow it or, put another way, turn it into a sacrificial offering, into the host; surrendered, then, to transformation, to "transubstantiation". This is what Christianity does with the Body of Christ, and this is how the mystic author understands the soul: the cryptic interior of the body, the crypt that, idealised now, re-appropriated, becomes invulnerable to finite time and extensive space. An interiorised image of the body, impervious still to all bodily form of the senses; but intelligible now and, in principle, transparent to the intellect.<sup>10</sup>

The soul is the intimate alienation of the body, the limit that the body supports and imprisons, its estrangement and its outside itself, the image that singularises it. However, that otherness, that alienation of the body which nonetheless animates and constitutes it, even though it can be neither seen nor felt, that untouchable aspect of the body, its most intimate entrails and the source therefore of its being, is no longer body, it is an "unbeing" body of the body, its alienation: it is soul. The border folded back towards the interior of the body, the limit of the inward-looking vector and also, as we shall see, of the one that looks outwards. That is the soul: pure limit, limit of the body.

In fact, in Teresa of Jesus's texts, the soul repeatedly appears as a receptacle, as a place. That is its most striking characteristic, which in *Las Moradas* is specifically referred to as "interior castle" or keeper of the secret. Thus begins the first chapter of *Las Moradas*:

While I was begging our Lord to-day to speak for me, since I knew not what to say nor how to commence this work which obedience has laid upon me, an idea occurred to me which I will explain, and which will serve as a foundation for that I am about to write. I thought of the soul as resembling a castle, formed of a single diamond or a very transparent crystal, and containing many rooms, just as in heaven there are many mansions. (I, 1, 1) (Teresa de Jesús 1994: 837)

Before analysing this paragraph in greater depth one needs to realise that the body is the outer limit of that castle and, thus it represents the interior limit of that enclosure, as limit of the limit. The process of knowledge as mystic process is an

<sup>10</sup> On this thinking see Nancy 2003.

inward pull, which starts at that limit which is crossed. From what I have termed the “overflowing” of the crypt body. A little later in the same chapter we read that: “Todo se nos va en la grosería del engaste o cerca de este castillo, que son estos cuerpos.” (*Las Moradas*, I, 1, 2) (Teresa de Jesús 1994: 838)

Thus, everything that follows these first moments of *Las Moradas* occurs within the enclosure, within the soul, which in turn is inside the body. The soul is the place of the placeless, as I said, the internal limit of the edge that is the body, *the otherness* of the place in the body or, perhaps, as will be seen later, the place of the Other:

Soul, thou must seek thyself in Me  
And thou must seek for Me in thee.

## A Logic of the Limit

The soul will be the link between the two vectors of the body that we have observed; the mystic will work on the soul to adapt the original to the image and also to “clarify” the opacity of the body crypt; but will assemble within it what is excluded: mix in its interior the internal meaninglessness of the body (crypt) with its necessary reference to the other, image. Internal, secret, stubborn, mute opacity; and the deviant, errant, lost condition of the exterior image. For, having swallowed the dead, the miasma is already within. In fact, in every mansion there are “many legions of demons”. (*Las Moradas*, I, 2, 12) (Teresa de Jesús 1994: 847)

Ultimately, the soul is the limit of the body, its beyond or its outside itself, and the work of the mystic is a work of limits. It is therefore advisable to describe in detail its structure, continue the work of that limit which, let it be said, brings together the opposites: place of encounter but also of exclusion and loss. That work of the limit in turn governs the image and the support, the two figures of the body. After all, the castle is a specular and labyrinthine structure, a place of detour that guards an incomprehensible secret, inaccessible to all reason. Like every labyrinth, its centre is a place of passage to another order, a space of transformation:

Although I have only mentioned seven mansions, yet each one contains many more rooms, above, below, and around it, with fair gardens, fountains, and labyrinths. (*Las Moradas*, Conclusión, 3) (Teresa de Jesús 1994: 997)<sup>11</sup>

And elsewhere:

in the centre, in the very midst of them all, is the principal chamber in which God and the soul hold their most secret intercourse (*Las Moradas*, I, 1, 3) (Teresa de Jesús 1994: 838)

That part of the soul, its “centre and midst”, is different from what at the time the mystics called the powers of the soul. That “centre” is a means of communication with the secret, it is the place of spiritual matrimony, the summit for Teresa of the entire mystic process. She calls it *spirit*, and it is the superior and most intimate part of the soul and, therefore, its limit. Moreover, it is the furthest from the body (“here there is no memory of the body”) (*Las Moradas*, VII, 2, 3) (Teresa de Jesús 1994: 979) and from itself: distance, extreme spacing. There the soul may “rise

11 On the labyrinth and its interpretation see Leyra 1995: 101–119.

above itself"<sup>12</sup>, she writes. There it may overflow itself and thus render impossible self-reflection. The spirit is the name that the author gives, then, to that capacity of the soul to leave itself and to leave the body ("That little bird of the spirit seems to have escaped this misery of this flesh and prison of the body" [*Cuentas de conciencia*, 54, 9] [Teresa de Jesús 1994: 1051]), which in a sense is a form of death. A death by overflow.

Here, in the placeless place of the secret, the Teresian text becomes awkward and the difficulties of expression mount up. There are expressions such as: "Well, I do not know what I am saying", or "I know not how to say it", or "I do not know what it is called", etc; but, in any case, one has to conclude that the lack of meaning is not a shortcoming or a negativity, but the outburst of an endlessness. It is the endlessness of the limit that is unfathomable, the edge of the limit, the limitation of the limit, the limit of the limit, and therefore not the absence of limit. Rather the impossible placement of the limit, its place without a place. Also the between, the middle, the "centre and midst", "which is where the most secret things occur"; in other words, that element of the limit that cannot be appropriated in terms of one shore or the other: neither here nor there, neither exterior nor interior, neither perceptible nor intelligible. The third even that is entirely limit. What the limit has of limit, of fissure, of rupture, of discontinuity, there where there is no longer one shore nor the other: the limit of the limit.

There (if indeed it is still possible to employ these adverbs of place), the limit is fragmented, interrupted in its selfhood by a difference, and inasmuch as Teresa's text considers the limit, her very writing is governed by that difference. In taking to the limit the commonplace notions of soul, body, perceptible, intelligible, reality or illusion; in strictly considering the edges, the "overflowing" is irretrievably imposed upon the Teresian text, beyond the author's own will. An interruption, perhaps a "deconstruction", is in progress.

The soul then is fractured, broken. The soul, the limit between the here of the body and the there of the divine, is outside itself within, in its innermost inside, its deepest part, its spirit:

there is a positive difference between the soul and the spirit, although they are one with each other. There is an extremely subtle distinction between them, so that sometimes they seem to at in a different manner from one another, as does the knowledge given to them by God. It also appears to me that the soul and its faculties are not identical (*Las Moradas*, VII, 1, 11) (Teresa de Jesús 1994: 977)

Only there, in that fraction of indefinite endlessness, in the infinite expansion of the limit, can "las cosas de mucho secreto" take place, what mystic theology formalised in its own way as spiritual matrimony with Christ.<sup>13</sup> If we had to formalise

---

<sup>12</sup> "I have often wondered whether, just as the sun does not leave its place in the heavens yet its rays have power to reach the earth instantaneously, so the soul and the spirit, which make one and the same thing, may, while remaining in its own place, through the strength of the warmth coming to it through the true Sun of Justice, send up some higher part of it above itself. Well, I know not of what I speak." (*Las Moradas*, VII, 6, 9) (Teresa de Jesús 1994: 938)

<sup>13</sup> "The soul, I mean the spirit of this soul, is made one with God." It is the closest to God because he too is spirit: ("Who is Himself a spirit, and Who has been pleased to show certain persons how far His love for us extends." (*Las Moradas*, VII, 2, 3) (Teresa de Jesús 1994: 979)

this operation of fragmenting the limit, of infinitisation of the *finis*, we would perhaps have to resort to the mathematical concept of fractal, that is, those virtual geometric shapes finite in surface but containing an infinite number of elements.

### Support of the Union

We have not left the body; we have merely continued on its journey to the limit. And we have not left, because the interior of the body already contains an outside itself. Body is contamination by the other, by the otherness, the place of the other as outside of me, of all of me, internal fracture that, nevertheless, is promised to endlessness. Strictly speaking, a body is always on its way, never finished, ended and, precisely due to its limitation, its status as limit. (“Soul, thou must seek thyself in Me, and thou must seek for Me in thee”).

By recourse to vectors I have sought to avoid a definition of the body, and have done so because, in this case of the body a definition that delineated the limits or the boundaries of the object defined would not give an account of that “going beyond” which is the body. Consequently, indefinable in the strict sense of the word, it gives rise to the clearest form of definition, the expression of its external limit: *the body is image and, precisely due to its finitude, supports an infinitude*. Its finitude overflows,<sup>14</sup> and the challenge when considering the body lies in thinking of that limit as the overflowing itself, as indefinition. From this perspective, terms like vector, *traction*, *relation* or *direction* lead to better comprehension of the subject that has brought us here and permit a more thorough treatment of the network of nomenclatures that abound in visionary scripts, namely: transfer, conveyance, detachment, flight, rapture, momentum, outburst, touch, whistle, silence, suspension, etc. By means of these, the mystical text describes and qualifies those ways of working with the limit of the body which are the forms of prayer. It is clear that the body is not regarded as a substance, but as a route of passage, a transit, not only from one life to the other, not only between here and there, but as a spacing that operates by crossing, through the workings of the limit or of the difference.

The driving force behind mystical-visionary writing is always that crossing (transfer, be transferred, etc.). This composes a scene of the body that acts in writing as *ex-perience*. She does not write, says the author, if it is not from experience, from crossing the limit, *ex-peri*, that the writing itself drives, writing *of* the mystical experience.

All asceticism, and there is no doubt that this is what writing is for her (hence her continual complaints about work, pain in the body or the head and constant recourse to the obedience to which she refers so often in her writings), is directed towards producing a body capable of enduring what is unbearable, the presence of the Absentee: body of writing, religious body or order, fleshly body. A body capable of enduring the absolute heterogeneity of the body, body-image of Christ, temple-crypt of Christ. Only thus can the body attain ownership, only thus is knowledge of the body, its crossing also experienced. And thus, irretrievably, the body is shed, because disappropriation is the condition of the body-limit. Let us be clear: the soul is the *ex-perience* of the body.

---

14 For more detailed development of this reasoning see Nancy 2002.

The task of the mystic is to join at the limit, in the soul, those two vectors that I have described, the body-image, the body outside of which is itself as a mere shadow given to the other; and the body-crypt, which guards within an inscrutable secret. She wants to identify the definition, the *finis*, with endless, with the bottomless or, put another way, identify the image with the support. The mystic seeks to construct a body that is at the same time the faithful image of divinity (so faithful that it identifies with the latter), hence her desire to live an earthly lifer whose model is evangelical Christ and, in the same body, be the mansion of God, receptacle of the infinite, host, living tabernacle.

This identification involves the soul, involves, therefore, the work of difference. She is at one and the same time “image” of God and “interior castle” for Him. Within her takes place the union with God; within her the support is identified with the image, because she is pure limit: finitude, edge, and image; and at the same time infinitude, absolute receptacle. The dual face of the limit. What happens is that when the mechanism of identity is set in motion, the endless mechanism of the identical, of the footprint, of the image, this does not work without the impossibility of the mechanism, without the conditionless infinitude of the support (other philosophers would call it destiny, “sky of destiny”, says the Nietzsche of Zarathustra), without the expansion of that otherness that expands to the edge, a structural interruption in every form of system or order.

Understandably, when support and image are identified with one another in the soul, the inversion is absolute, if God is support, the soul is image, if God is the image, and the soul is support. Well, this “infinite” inversion, this endlessness of images, can only be considered from a distance, across an unbridgeable space, via an impossible unity, work of difference which leads the mystic to say at the end of the seventh *Las Moradas*, even after the spiritual marriage: “siempre se ha de vivir con temor” (VII, 3, 13) (Teresa de Jesús 1994: 988), because there is always a maybe, an indetermination a “podrá tornar la guerra primera, si nos apartamos de Dios”. This, which has been understood as self-censorship or excessive distrust, even as doctrinal disobedience, is no more than the most exhaustive thoroughness: work of difference. We could call such a special inversion the emotional catastrophe:

Soul, thou must seek thyself in Me  
And thou must seek for Me in thee.

### The Soul's Catastrophe

When the reading of the Teresian texts appears to be leading to a final reference beyond representations, when as readers fascinated by that final presentation, by that apocalypse finally revealed, we expect to encounter an ultimate substance, support of ownership whose relationship with the image is unequivocal, it turns out that we find another detour. We had been warned, because we have seen that there can be no limit without overflow. And so, the absolute reference, which seemed to be that Christ within the soul, turns out to be the same image, the image of “our soul”, image of image whose selfhood involves the other.

We read in chapter two of the seventh *Moradas* in reference to a mirror in which only sin prevents us from seeing ourselves:

It is we who fail by not disposing ourselves fitly, nor removing all that can obstruct this light, so that we do not behold ourselves in this mirror wherein our image is engraved. (VII, 2, 8) (Teresa de Jesús 1994: 981–982)

To which mirror does she refer? This is really no more than the development of what she had written in chapter 40 of the *Libro de la vida*:

Once, when I was with the whole community reciting the Office, my soul became suddenly recollected, and seemed to me all bright as a mirror, clear behind, sideways, upwards, and downwards; and in the centre of it I saw Christ our Lord, as I usually see Him. It seemed to me that I saw Him distinctly in every part of my soul, as in a mirror, and at the same time the mirror was all sculptured – I cannot explain it – in our Lord Himself by a most loving communication which I can never describe. (40, 5) (Teresa de Jesús 1994: 296)

And later:

Let us suppose Divinity to be a most brilliant diamond, much larger than the whole world, or a mirror like that to which I compared the soul in a former vision, only in a way so high that I cannot possibly describe it; and that all our actions are seen in that diamond, which is of such dimensions as to include everything, because nothing can be beyond it. (40, 10) (Teresa de Jesús 1994: 298)

Christ is the mirror that reflects the soul and in the soul is reflected Christ. We perceive a double mirroring, a mirror facing another mirror. The interior is but the reflected exterior that it is but the reflected interior. Here the image is no longer the representation of a body, but the image of another image. It is what we might call the infinite reflection of the image or the catastrophe of the image, its permanent inversion that renders each an image of the image, let us recall: “nada hay que salga fuera de esta grandeza”. What is stated here with astonishing clarity is the closure of the imaginary space: there is only image, and no longer representation understood as unnecessary duplication that takes place in an imaginary or representational space, representation of what its own self has in another real space, autonomous and independent of the representation, original, one could say.

This closure signifies that the image has been freed of any reference that is not in turn image that is not included in the imaginary space. Strictly speaking, this is an “atheism of the image” (Deleuze 2002: 18), since none refers to a particular meaning beyond representation. Yet, by the same token, neither does there exist an image that is not broken beforehand, that is not an image by virtue of a fragmentation or an internal interruption which, just as it imposes upon it repetition (every image is repeatable), denies it identification with itself, interrupting the order of the finite, of the limited of the image. The imaginary space is fractured or, in other words: there is but image; but not *the* image as such. In each image there is more than one image and, of course, a beyond the imaginary. The imaginary space is interrupted, contains a beyond the imaginable: literally an *unimaginable*.

Such is the power of love's impress,  
O soul, to grave thee on My heart,  
That any craftsman must confess  
He never could have the like success,  
However superlative his art.

The body support, the pure support, ownership, the body of the image, is unimaginable, and the image is the infinite reflection of the body, its intimacy crossed, an outward crossing of which it is composed. Thus, the image does not have its own meaning, not even that of its support, because at its limit it reveals but the infinity of the body: always of this particular body. The image exposes the most intimate part of the body, its constitutive impropriety. The image, as I said, is the catastrophe of the body and not its representation, in any case the presentation of the unimaginable of the body. Seen in this light, every body is an imagined body, especially for itself.

#### References:

- De Certeau, Michel (1982), *La Fable Mystique*, Vol. I. Paris: Gallimard.  
 Deleuze, Gilles (2002), *Francis Bacon. Logique de la sensation*, Paris: Editions du Seuil.  
 Derrida, Jacques (1985), *La voz y el fenómeno*, P. Peñalver (trans.), Valencia: Pre-textos.  
 -. (1982), *L'oreille de l'autre, otobiographies, transferts, traductions: textes et débats* (avec C. Lévesque et C. McDonald), Montréal: vlb Editeur.  
 Leyra, Ana María (1995), *Poética y transfilosofía*, Madrid: Fundamentos.  
 Nancy, Jean-Luc (2007), *Ego sum*, J. C. Moreno Romo (trans.), Barcelona: Anthropos.  
 -. (2003), *Corpus*, P. Bulnes (trans.), Madrid: Arena Libros.  
 -. (2002), *Un pensamiento finito*, J. C. Moreno Romo (trans.), Barcelona: Anthropos.  
 Teresa de Jesús (1994), *Obras Completas*. Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad.

#### Hulijan Santos Gerero

##### Reprezentacija, reaproprijacija: telo slike u mističkom tekstu Tereze Avilske

###### Apstrakt

Ono što sledi samo je pokušaj da se izvuku lekcije iz mističkih i vizionarskih tekstova Tereze Avilske, kako bi se danas razmotrili problemi koji nas interesuju, pitanja koja se postavljaju pred estetiku, ali ne tek kao pred teorijsku disciplinu koja teoretiše o umetnostima i razmatra lepo, već kao refleksiju o *diathesis*, čulnosti, čulnom rubu koji je izložen kroz konstitutivni odnos kojim je čovek postavljen u svet. Prema tome, razmatranje o događaju, ulasku u svet, kreativnom iskustvu. Ovaj esej nastoji da razmotri odnos između slike i tela kroz vizionarske diskurse mistika, jer njihovi spisi propituju i daju oblik velikom broju misaonih formula koje mogu da nam pomognu da bolje razumemo pitanja sa kojima se danas suočavamo. Zamislimo da su mistici od svog tela načinili granicu ili oslonac na kojima se ono što po definiciji nema mesto događa. Mesto: deo prostora koji zauzima telo (Njutn), granica sadržanog tela (Aristotel). To je, dakle, ono o čemu se ovde govori, pitanje granica.

Ključne reči: slika, telo, mistički tekst, Tereza Avilska, granica